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REMARKS BY U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH MARCIA STEPHENS BLOOM BERNICAT AT A BILATERAL DIALOGUE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING AMERICAN CLUB, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2015

Police, Prosecutors, Members of Civil Society and Ladies and Gentlemen;

I am honored today to be able to open and sponsor this one day program on human trafficking which is designed to be an ongoing dialogue between our respective countries on a global challenge that we both face: namely, human trafficking. I wish to assure you that this is a truly important issue for me and for the United States and we are committed to working closely with you to eradicate this modern day evil.

This issue is very close to my heart because my great grandmother was a victim of human trafficking. Born as a mixed race child in the 19th century in the Shinnecock Indian Tribe, an Indian Tribe on the eastern end of Long Island, New York, she was given as an infant to a white family where she worked for years as an indentured servant, a washer woman and house maid before she was freed at the age of majority. More than 150 years ago, we fought a horrific civil war to abolish slavery in the United States, but today, slavery continues with a modern face with labor trafficking, sex trafficking, beggar trafficking, child soldiers and other forms of coerced labor.

We hope to accomplish several goals with this program. First, we are proud to continue our long cooperation with the Government of Bangladesh and civil society against trafficking. Like transnational crime such as organized crime, drug smuggling, and the sale of illicit arms, no one nation alone can overcome human trafficking. Just as criminals in different countries work together to commit crimes, we must work together and partner to prevent transnational crime, to prosecute these criminals, and to protect crime victims. Countries like Bangladesh – primarily a source of trafficking victims – and countries like the United States – itself a source, transit, and destination country – must work together. This program signals our interest and willingness to work with Bangladesh to address trafficking in persons and other transnational crimes.

Second, we in the United States have taken many steps over the last decade to counter this horrific crime, and we have experience and increasing expertise that we can share with our partners to help them combat this crime. One of the most powerful lessons that we have learned over the last decade is the “whole village approach,” that is to say, the realization that all society can and must play an important role in preventing trafficking, protecting victims and prosecuting traffickers. In the United States, civil society and non-governmental organizations are full fledged partners in the fight against human traffickers and work side by side with police and prosecutors.

Non-governmental organizations bring unique assets to the fight against trafficking. These organizations conduct prevention and awareness campaigns that caution men and women about the dangers of human trafficking and help them avoid falling victim to traffickers’ ploys and misrepresentations. Public awareness campaigns about human trafficking raise the awareness of society to the horrors of this issue and help the public to identify trafficking victims and share information with the appropriate authorities.

NGOs play an important role in rescuing victims and efficiently supplying badly needed services to rescued victims. NGOs are powerful advocates for the rights and needs of victims and can serve as an intermediary between law enforcement and the victim. NGOs can supply badly needed psychological and mental assistance and support, protection and as safe place to live and recover. NGOs can help law enforcement find victims and can help victims prepare to testify at trial, and support them during their testimony.

Today’s program has several important points: it will highlight the American experience with human trafficking, and some of the lessons we learned, from a federal prosecutor who prosecuted human trafficking cases in the United States and who has spent the last decade working with other countries to address trafficking. You will hear from an expert on Bangladeshi anti-trafficking law who will discuss your new and very powerful trafficking legislation and highlight how it can be used. An American law enforcement officer will discuss some of the challenges we face with trafficking, and we will conclude with presentations by local non-governmental organizations on their work on human trafficking and the important assistance that they can provide. This program unites police, prosecutors and NGOs, from the United States and from Bangladesh to share expertise and experience, a whole village approach.

Let me conclude by wishing you the very best and assuring you of our ongoing commitment to work closely with you to end modern day slavery. Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*